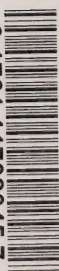


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A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

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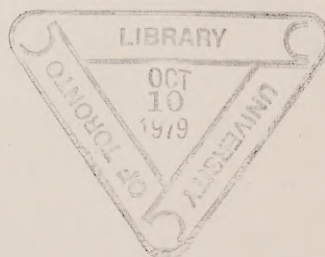
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A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH
VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

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Foreword

Vietnamese refugees are being welcomed to Canada with sympathy, goodwill, and an eagerness to understand and help them. This pamphlet contains some information on the Vietnamese as a people, their culture, religion and family structure, and is intended as a brief guide to understanding and working with Vietnamese refugees.

It is based on material collated by Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Catholic Conference, with the addition of Canadian and other reference material.

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Throughout 2,000 years of recorded history, to which legend adds 2,000 more, the Vietnamese have been sustained by a feeling of unity based on common origin, language and cultural heritage. They are intensely proud of having been an independent and unified nation for centuries although they also experienced periods of disunity and foreign domination. They take equal pride in their cultural heritage, regarded by them as testimony to their talent for absorbing foreign cultures without themselves losing distinct political and cultural identity.

A striking feature of Vietnam's history is the story of its relations with China, its vastly larger and more powerful neighbour to the north. Over the centuries the Vietnamese have admired China for its culture and feared it for its power. During the 1,000 years (second century B.C. to the tenth century A.D.) that the country was ruled directly by China, the people accepted Chinese culture, but politically remained militantly anti-Chinese.

Freeing themselves from direct Chinese control in 938 A.D., they jealously guarded their independence, at times holding off invading Chinese and Mongolian armies, and at others resorting to hard bargaining, the payment of tribute or the acceptance of nominal Chinese overlordship.

Chinese rule was followed by varying degrees of independence under a succession of Vietnamese emperors presiding over a powerful bureaucracy. Revolts were numerous and, with brief periods of reasserted Chinese control, one dynasty fell, only to be replaced by another.

Because of powerful China to the north, and apart from defending themselves against occasional northern invaders, the main thrust of Vietnamese history has been directed southward. This process of southern expansion continued down the coastline until the Vietnamese acquired the fertile lands of the Mekong River Delta in the 18th century.

Vietnam came under the colonial domination of the French in the 19th century. The French, much more than the Chinese before them, remained alien to the people. The Vietnamese, as they always had, reacted to foreign control with reluctant acquiescence and when they could, with open resistance. During World War II, French rule was exercised by representatives of the Vichy regime at the sufferance of Japan until March, 1945, when it was ended by a Japanese coup d'etat. After Japan's surrender at the end of the war, the French returned, but their position was not viable.

The Indochina war broke out at the end of 1946 and ended nearly eight years later in the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. With the achievement of independence and the partitioning of the country in 1954, Vietnam entered a new phase of conflict, between the regimes in the South and in the North. After almost 20 years of war, the South surrendered to the North in 1975.

THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE: AN OVERVIEW

About 85 per cent of South Vietnam's population is ethnically Vietnamese. The population is relatively young, with a greater preponderance of females due to the nation's almost continuous state of war. Because some two million refugees entered South Vietnam from the North after partition in 1954 and during the long war which followed, a large part of the South's total population is composed of recently displaced persons.

The majority of South Vietnam's population has always been rural, although the number of urban Vietnamese has risen since the Indochina War, most moving to the cities in search of physical safety.

The Chinese, to whom the Vietnamese are closely related, ethnically and culturally, form the largest minority group in Vietnam. Until recently they played an important role in the country's economy as businessmen and entrepreneurs.

The second largest minority group are the Montagnards (mountain people) living in the highlands of the Chaine Annamitique, spread over a territory about half the size of the country. They include more than 30 tribes, representing numerous social types, dialects and cultural patterns.

The third largest minority group are the Khmers (Cambodians).

Language

A number of Vietnamese refugees speak some French or English. However, among the most recent wave of refugees there are many who speak only Chinese and/or Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese language is a tonal language, using five different tones or inflections. Distinctions in meaning are made through the use of levels of pitch.

There are three major dialects of the Vietnamese language, each very different. Vietnamese is written in Roman characters with a variety of accent marks. It can be typed on a Canadian typewriter, with accent marks added by hand.

It may help those teaching English to Vietnamese refugees to know that in Vietnamese, verbs are not conjugated; nouns, pronouns and adjectives are not declined; number and gender do not exist. Grammatical distinctions are made through changes in word order and the use of certain words which serve as grammatical indicators. The basic components of Vietnamese words are single syllables, each of which expresses a distinct idea.

An important feature of Vietnamese is a system of personal pronouns and personal classifiers indicating status relationships. Age, education, personal achievement and official rank command respect, and this respect is displayed in speech as well as conduct. The use of the wrong term or form can cause offense.

Names

In Vietnam, the family name is written first, followed by at least two more names, the last of which is the first name. "Thi" as part of a Vietnamese name indicates that the child is a girl, "Van" a boy. The terms Mrs., Mr. and Miss are used with the given name rather than the family name.

Huynh Thi Le Huyen

family name a girl first name

A man's full name may be:

Nguyen Trong Thiet (Jones Paul John)

Because there are not many different surnames, a great number of Vietnamese are Nguyens (Joneses). For this reason, a Vietnamese person is properly called by his given name. In this case:

Mr. Thiet (Mr. John)

If the man has a wife, she may, in different situations be called:

Mrs. Thiet (Mrs. John)

or

Mrs. _____ (Mrs. Mary)

References to "first name" and "last name" are not advisable. Even the term "family name" can be misunderstood; some Vietnamese take it to mean the name given to them by their families (i.e., the given name). For recordkeeping, a well placed comma seems a good clarifying tool - (Nguyen, Trong Thiet). In conversation, it is simplest to ask a Vietnamese person which name he or she prefers.

FAMILY, RELIGION AND SOCIAL VALUES

Family Structure

By 1975 the average Vietnamese family had experienced more than 30 years of severe stress and hardship. The population came to include millions who had been uprooted from places where they had family ties dating back hundreds, in some cases, thousands of years. This too is true of many Vietnamese refugees in North America today.

Individual family members sometimes were separated and resettled in places so far apart that they could not convene for the rites and celebrations which traditionally reinforced family solidarity. The network of family ties was further disrupted by deaths and separation arising out of military action or by political loyalties setting one kinsman against another. Despite this, much of the traditional family system persists.

The family represents the chief source of social identity for the individual. Nearly all Vietnamese still feel that the family has first claim on their loyalties and that the interests of each individual are subordinate to those of his common descent group.

Throughout his life, the typical Vietnamese has been caught up with the activities of a multitude of relatives. Members of the same household lived together, worked together and on frequent occasions, met together with a wider circle of kinsmen for marriages, funerals, lunar New Year celebrations and rituals marking the anniversaries of an ancestor's death. People looked first to their families for help and counsel in times of personal crisis.

The Vietnamese family structure is paternal. Individuals are identified by their connections through the father and the father's male line. A married woman joins the family of her husband, and after her death it is in his family rather than her own that her soul is venerated. Persons of the same kin group share the same family name.

The traditional Vietnamese household consists of three generations, usually a senior couple, a married son with his wife and children and the senior couple's unmarried children.

Religion

Traditionally the majority of Vietnam's inhabitants have identified themselves as Buddhists. Buddhism, founded about 500 B.C., emerged in northern India as an offshoot of the Hindu faith.

Two religious movements indigenous to the Mekong Delta, both founded in this century, enjoy important followings. The Cao Dai, the older of the two, is represented in the rural sectors of the southern Delta region. It is an offshoot of Buddhism. The other, Hoa Hoa, also identifies itself as a reformed Buddhist sect.

Catholicism was introduced into Vietnam by European missionaries in the 16th century and since the late 19th century has played an important role in the country's political life. Catholics accounted for about 10 per cent of South Vietnam's population in 1975.

Beyond the realm of organized religion lies an equally important influence on Vietnamese life and thought, that of Confucianism, the ethical system originating in China in the teachings of the moral philosopher Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and his followers. Until the late 19th century, Confucian values, learned in the home and from exposure to the Chinese classics, were universally held. In the modern period, there were changes in traditional attitudes and values; nevertheless, nearly everyone, including young people educated abroad, continues in one degree or another to feel the impact of the country's Confucian heritage.

Similarly, beliefs in good and evil spirits, both animate and inanimate, permeate the society. Such beliefs have existed since ancient times and pre-date all religions.

One of the basic assumptions relating to the nature of life experience shared by nearly all Vietnamese is that of universal order in which the processes of heaven and earth are viewed as displaying a fundamental regularity and harmony of operation. The sun, moon, stars and four seasons as well as all human relationships between individuals and within the family, the state and society are controlled by natural principles. In their fundamental makeup, human beings too are completely in harmony with this arranged natural order. Not all persons, however, are equally able to control their passions and bring their inner selves into accord with it.

Family religious observances take place in the home or in the family temple, if there is one. Most families have an ancestral altar dedicated to Buddha placed in a prominent place in the main room of the house. The ancestral altar is set with incense, burners, candlesticks, trays and bowl stands.

Rites honouring the ancestors are performed on feast days and on the anniversary of the death of each ancestor.

Marriage

Marriage in Vietnam is often viewed as a social contract. In selecting a wife, the groom's family will be interested in the girl's character, her ability to perform household tasks and the social reputation and medical history of her family. The girl's family will be concerned with character and family background.

Position of Men and Women

It is a long-standing Confucian tradition that elders, males, and persons of superior positions are honoured and respected. The younger is submissive to the elder, the female to the male. Great respect is given men, especially elder men, and to the head of the lineage who traditionally make all important decisions for all family members. Throughout her marriage a woman is expected to be dutiful and respectful toward both her husband and his parents. Nonetheless a wife retains her own identity and with the passage of time, her role in family affairs increases. Both the urban housewife and her village counterpart typically manage the family budget.

Child Care and Training

The husband and wife with numerous offspring are envied. If there are sons among the children, it is assured that the family will be perpetuated and the Cult of the Ancestors maintained. The birth of a baby, whether boy or girl, is a happy event accompanied by various celebrations and ceremonies.

Boys and girls are raised differently and a boy is soon taught his superior position. Older boys often expect to be waited on by their sisters and younger siblings.

A Vietnamese baby is held in his mother's arms; however, when he gets a little older, his mother will usually carry him on her hip. The children generally are held a great deal, and they are not encouraged to walk as early or as much as many North American children are. Love is communicated through talking softly to the child and through close physical contact and affection. Older children, especially girls, are expected to look after the younger ones in the family. Vietnamese children are very adept at squatting and can assume that position for long periods of time.

Vietnamese parents tend not to discipline or to place extensive limits on their children at as young an age as North American parents. Generally, corporal punishment such as spanking or slapping a child's hands is not used, but rather the children are spoken to in a quiet, controlled manner.

The Vietnamese people, including the children, usually do not express their anger or displeasure in a very direct manner; instead, it is expressed in a more passive way which may sometimes be interpreted by Westerners as stubborn, obstructionistic behavior. Especially for the older child, it may take considerable time before he feels comfortable in verbally expressing negative thoughts and feelings.

Waving Motions: Waving motions in Vietnam are quite different than in Canada. To try to call children by beckoning with the fingers while the palm is up will baffle them. But put your palm down and motion them toward you with the entire palm and fingers, somewhat in a "pawing" motion, and they will understand. Our usual movement for waving goodbye may seem like "come here," but if you raise your hand and wave the whole hand from side to side, the child will feel as if you are giving him a good send-off.

"Mongolian Spot": Some children have what resembles a black-and-blue spot on the lower part of their back just above the buttocks. This is known as a "Mongolian spot." This is not something about which to be concerned, and will disappear as the child grows older.

The shape of some Vietnamese children's heads may be quite flat on the back. Most Vietnamese prefer that shape of head, and they encourage this flattening process by propping the baby's head on either side with pillows when he is lying down, thus prohibiting his rolling from side to side.

Toilet Training and Cleanliness: In all Oriental countries, children are expected to learn toilet habits by imitating the older children and there is little effort or emotion put into formal training. It is common for children to urinate on the ground where they are playing, rather than go to the toilet-building.

Often Oriental children are less modest regarding excretory functions than youngsters in Canada. We advise you to encourage children to assume standards as they are in Canada, but also have patience and understanding that making this adjustment may take some time.

Because flush toilets are not common in Asia, the children may be frightened of them, and also of the bathtub. Show children how they work, and give them time to get used to them.

Sometimes a Vietnamese mother will wash or wipe a child's tongue with a lemon and salt solution before he is old enough to brush his teeth himself.

Clothing: The Vietnamese children's clothing also resembles what is worn in Canada, although instead of wearing dresses, the girls tend more frequently to wear a blouse and loose pants which resemble pajamas. Babies will frequently not wear diapers. Little children in Vietnam are not used to wearing socks and shoes. Often they play outside barefooted. Initially they may have difficulty becoming accustomed to wearing footwear all day.

Personal Characteristics and Social Patterns

Class Structure: Many Vietnamese take class distinctions and status quite seriously. Upper-class Vietnamese may be reluctant to associate with members of a lower class or allow their children to play together.

Formality: The Vietnamese, particularly those with limited exposure to Western ways, practise a formality which is in sharp contrast to North American casualness. They continue to address Western persons as Mr., Mrs., or Miss until invited to do otherwise. With Vietnamese persons, they may change to terms such as "uncle" and "aunt" which are more familiar and also more respectful of elders. After a short time here, Vietnamese learn that Canadian casualness in addressing persons is not meant as disrespect, but as friendliness.

If a Canadian were to thank a Vietnamese person for anything, he would probably be thanked in return. To the Vietnamese, it is strange when "you're welcome" is abbreviated into a "that's o.k.," "uh huh," or "no sweat".

Traditional politeness requires that an invitation must be refused initially. Upon being pressed, a Vietnamese may then accept.

"Dutch treat" invitations are rare among the Vietnamese. Unless the contrary is made quite plain, it is assumed that any suggestion to eat together is an offer to assume the cost. An offer to pay ones own portion of the bill may offend a Vietnamese host.

Even at informal dinners, the younger and lower status individuals will not begin eating before their elders or "superiors" have begun. They will even invite their "superiors" to begin.

Social Harmony: The Vietnamese place a high value on maintaining harmony in their social relationships. They will avoid confrontations at all costs and are unlikely to say "no" easily. Consequently, a "yes" from a Vietnamese may not necessarily mean that he agrees with you or understands your English; he may be trying to be polite.

The value set on harmony in interpersonal relations is expressed in everyday situations through the use of delicacy, tact, politeness and gentleness in dealing with others. When an arrangement is to be made between two individuals or interested groups, for example, it is customary to hire an intermediary to conduct the negotiations, so as to minimize the possibilities for friction. An intermediary is usually employed, for instance, when a marriage is to be arranged between a potential bride and bridegroom who are unknown to one another. By avoiding a face-to-face confrontation until both parties have agreed to the contract, either possible partner, if he so desires, can ease out of the situation gracefully with no offense to the other.

Similarly, in the interest of harmony in social relationships the Vietnamese are prone to refrain from litigation and formal processes for settling differences; they prefer to work things out informally. To avoid offending others, Vietnamese are careful to behave modestly. Bragging and boasting are strongly disapproved. Parents, for example, when hearing their child praised for doing something will usually reply proudly with the customary polite expression, "He has really done so little."

Because of the value placed on harmonious relations, a person, if offended by someone of equal or superior social status, will make an extreme effort to maintain his equanimity and to avoid revealing resentment or anger.

Self-Control: Vietnamese culture, reflecting its Buddhist heritage, places a high premium on the disciplined acceptance of things as they are. Life in Vietnam has been insecure for all, yet complaints are rarely heard. Stoicism is a major value.

Self-control also demands restraint in conduct; Vietnamese tend to keep their voices low and conduct conversations quietly. They respect those who show themselves to be gentle and amiable, polite and courteous in dealings with others, and passionate, uncontrolled displays of feeling are strongly disapproved. From childhood the members of traditionally oriented families are taught the importance of self-discipline and of willing submission to parental authority.

It is wise for Canadians to keep in mind that the Vietnamese people typically relate to each other, and prefer to be related to, indirectly. While hand-shaking is generally accepted among men, it is probably best to wait for a woman to offer her hand first. Do not pat children on the head, even affectionately, as the Vietnamese consider this offensive, and ask their parents first before offering them candy.

A few more points of a personal nature:

- . It is easier for most Vietnamese to understand English when it is spoken in a soft or medium tone and if the speed is slowed down a bit. The people normally speak softly and with a smile.

- . Avoid using slang, idioms and contractions.

- . When meeting a Vietnamese family, always greet the family head and older people first, then the children. Until the family becomes used to Canadian customs, defer to and work through the family head.

- . Motion someone toward you or into place by extending your arm out straight, palm down, and fluttering your fingertips towards you. Our palm upward way is used only to call animals and is interpreted as an insult.

SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION

In Vietnam: Education is held in high regard by all segments of Vietnamese society. To most Vietnamese, urban and rural, education represents the essential stepping stone to profitable jobs and social prestige. Even in the poorest rural areas, where schools were often lacking altogether, parents made every effort to have their children tutored at least in the rudiments of reading and writing.

Education in Vietnam was organized along the lines of the French school system. Completion of 12 years of elementary and secondary school led to the baccalaureat examination which qualified those who passed for entrance to colleges and universities in Vietnam or abroad. Significant numbers of the upper classes saw to it that their children were educated at universities in France, other European nations or North America. The Chinese set up their own schools where possible.

In Canada: If children are of school age it may be wise to allow them time at home, several weeks perhaps, before introducing them to still another unsettling experience -- school with its unfamiliar people, expectations and language. Do not worry about the "schooling" they may be missing by not attending formal classes. Remember that they have much everyday information to catch up on.

Children under the age of 12 will generally adapt easily, within a few months, to the Canadian school system. Teenagers may take longer to adjust, because of language difficulties and because their parents may expect them to take part-time jobs to help support the family.

It may be advisable to start children in school at a grade or two lower than their chronological age, with the possibility of allowing them to take two grades a year when they have sufficient language and background to move ahead.

The older the child, the more self-conscious he is likely to be about his language deficiencies, and he may tend to act as if he understands even though he does not. Parents and sponsors should discuss this and other problems with teachers and the school board.

CLIMATE AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Canadian weather will present most Vietnamese refugees with one of their biggest adjustments. Most of the refugees received here will have been used to a monsoon climate with rather consistent average temperatures of 25-30 C (77-86 F). For people used to warm weather all year round, it will take time to become accustomed to the harsh Canadian winter. Older people are particularly affected.

On the basis of the living conditions they left behind in Vietnam, many refugees will be quite satisfied to live in small apartments. A family of six or eight, for example, might not object to starting life in Canada in a two-bedroom flat. Their furniture requirements will be likewise modest.

Sleeping Customs: The Vietnamese sleep in beds; however, the bed usually does not have springs or mattress. The surface of the bed is made of either wood or bamboo and is covered with a reed mat. During the cool, rainy season many Vietnamese may sleep in their street clothes because blankets are expensive and are not needed year-round.

Because of the warm climate in their homeland, Vietnamese are used to spending time outdoors and moving about freely in all seasons. They are likely to feel "cooped-up" indoors during the long Canadian winter.

FOOD AND A BASIC SHOPPING LIST

Some Vietnamese refugees will, of course, experience some difficulty in adjusting to the Canadian diet and to shopping in Canadian supermarkets. Most of the foods Vietnamese are familiar with are available to one degree or another throughout Canada, particularly in or near cities which have Chinese populations.

The Vietnamese are used to very little milk and milk products in their diet, and like many Orientals are not equipped genetically with the enzymes needed to digest dairy foods properly. Care should be taken in introducing these foods to the Vietnamese.

The basic food in Vietnam is rice. There are two, possibly three meals a day. The rice is supplemented by noodle soup, greens, and small amounts of meat and fish. There are many fruits - bananas, mangos, papayas, oranges, coconuts, pineapple. Fresh milk is usually not available. Older Vietnamese children commonly drink tea. Babies and toddlers are also fed soft-cooked rice, and soup with small amounts of cooked meat or fish.

Because of the limited diet, it is common for toddlers and school-age children to have poor teeth. Occasionally the teeth will have black streaks in them. While of course dental attention is very much needed, this should be done only after the child is sufficiently settled and secure to be able to tolerate the apprehension and/or pain which it will cause.

A Basic Shopping List for a Vietnamese Family

Rice	Butter
Whole wheat flour	Fish Sauce (Huoc mam, a
White flour	pungent sauce of fish
Fish	preserved in brine.)
Shrimp	Soy Sauce
Chicken	Sugar
Pork	Salt
Beef	Pepper
Eggs	Banana
Green Vegetables	Banana stalk
Bean Sprouts	Red pepper
Chinese Noodles	Cucumber
Potatoes	Vegetable oil
Onions	Orange juice
Fruits	Milk (note dietary restric-
Breads (especially crusty breads)	tion above)
Garlic	Tea
Ginger	Coffee
Soya Cheese	Soup broth
Candy	Soft drinks
Chopsticks (if possible)	

Note: Vietnamese prefer eating from individual bowls.

THE VIETNAMESE WORK FORCE AND ECONOMY

Vietnam is now one of the world's poorest countries. Years of war, upheaval and the changeover to a Communist regime have resulted in reduced agricultural yields and a slowdown or stoppage of industrial production.

Relationships between employers and workers were traditionally paternalistic. Most small enterprises of all kinds were family undertakings and usually completely staffed by relatives. Many of the Chinese minority worked in enterprises of this kind.

Women represented a large proportion of the labour force. In recent years many women have been forced to support their families as their husbands and male relatives were drafted into military and other kinds of service by the regime.

In the retail industry, bargaining was the normal accompaniment of most transactions. Vietnamese currency is the piastre, divided into 100 cents.

POLITICAL ORIENTATION

For the vast majority of people, their primary allegiance is to family and village, in that order. The national government usually ranked a poor third. Most Vietnamese have had little notion and still less experience with representative government and related political processes. Again, the urban sophisticate is the exception, and he is represented in large numbers among the refugees. He is familiar with constitutional concepts and democratic ideals.

BASIC ENGLISH-VIETNAMESE WORD LIST

Vietnamese	Transliteration	English
<u>Thức ăn</u>		<u>Food</u>
Gạo	Gum	Rice
Cá	Ka	Fish
Trái cây	Try	Fruit
Sữa	Shu-a	Milk
Nước	Nook	Water
Thịt	Tete	Meat
Uống	Ung	To drink
Ăn	Ang	To eat
 <u>Tính cảm</u>		 <u>Feelings</u>
Mệt	Met	Tired
Thích	Tit	To like
Giận	Young	Angry
Sung sướng	Shum Suong	Happy
Đói bụng	Doe Boong	Hungry
Tốt	Tope	Good
Xấu	Sow	Bad
Nóng	Numb	Hot
Thương	You	Love you
Đau đầu/Nhức đầu	Dau Dau	Headache
Nhớ nhà	Nha Nha	Homesick

Nhà

Đi về nhà
Cái giường
Nhà cầu
Nhà thờ
Trường học

Xứ và gia đình

Máy bay
Ca-na-đa
Đại Hàn
Việt Nam
Gia đình
Cha
Má
Anh
Em trai
Chi
Em gái
Con trai
Con gái

Linh tinh

Cám ơn
Không có chi
Không

De Vay Nha
Ki-young
Cow
Nha Ta
Trung Hop

My-by
Canada
Di Hang
Vietnam
Ya Din
Cha
Ma
Anh
Em Try
Che
Em Guy
Cawn Try
Cawn Guy

Cam Mun
Kome Caw Chee
Kome

Home

Go home
Bed
Toilet
Church
School

Country and Family

Airplane
Canada
Korea
Vietnam
Family
Father
Mother
Brother (older)
(younger)
Sister (older)
(younger)

Son
Daughter

Miscellaneous

Thank you
You're welcome
No

Câu

Đi tiểu không ?

Ăn đủ chưa ?

Em đói bụng không ?

Em buồn ngủ không ?

Em đau không ?

Em muốn gì ?

Tôi rất tiếc

Không có sợ

Em de te-u kome?

Em ang dew chua?

Em doi bung kome?

Em buong ngu kome?

Em dau kome?

Em moon ye?

Toy rat teak

Kome cau sha

Sentences

Do you need to use the
bathroom?

Have you eaten enough?

Are you hungry?

Are you sleepy?

Are you sick?

What do you want?

I am sorry

Don't be afraid

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